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ABSTRACT

Strategies for preventing or responding to truancy and dropping out of school are offered in this resource paper. The document's first few pages draw on statistics from around the United States to illustrate the magnitude of the problem in terms of both its scope and its consequences. The paper then turns to its major focus, strategies to increase attendance. Addressing first the problem of truancy, actions to prevent the development of truant behavior are suggested. Strategies for intervening to prevent truancy from becoming habitual are presented next, and then methods for coping with chronic truancy are offered. Four currently operating programs for responding to truancy are described and contact persons named. The paper next considers strategies related to dropping out, beginning with strategies for prevention. Intervention strategies are presented next, followed by methods for dealing with chronic or permanent dropouts. Four dropout programs are described and addresses for further information provided. The strategies suggested involve the schools, the community, and legal and judicial authorities. The activities include organizing a truancy prevention committee, having a clearly stated truancy policy, improving communication, providing student counseling, offering special training for teachers and staff, setting up alternative educational programs, and cooperating with juvenile authorities. Useful publications and helpful organizations are listed and reprints of recent articles about the truancy problem are provided. (PGD)

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INCREASING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

NSSC RESOURCE PAPER

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INCREASING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

The youth of America have been called the nation's greatest natural resource but each year a considerable portion of that great resource is wasted.

Truancy and dropout problems are plaguing schools throughout the country. The dropout rate is 26 percent nationally, which means that at least one out of every four students entering high school will not graduate.

Public education was established in this country to assure the nation of a literate, enlightened and productive population to perpetuate the fundamental democratic ideals of the political and cultural institutions of our society.

There is no doubt the nation's economic health is directly affected by the large number of uneducated and under-educated youths who later comprise a large part of our adult population.

A 1972 report to the Senate Select Committee on Educational Opportunity from Professor Henry M. Levin of Stanford University found that failure to attain a minimum of high school completion among males 25-34 years old in 1969 was estimated to cost the nation:

- * \$237 billion in income over the lifetime of these men; and,
- * \$71 billion in foregone government revenues of which about \$47 billion would have been added to the Federal Treasury and \$24 billion to the coffers of State and local governments.
- * Welfare expenditures attributable to inadequate education were estimated to be about \$3 billion a year and rising.
- * Costs to the nation of crime that is related to inadequate education were estimated at about \$3 billion a year and rising.

Historically, the problem of high dropout rates has been much more prevalent among minorities, particularly blacks and Hispanics. There is no new evidence to show that widespread racial differences have changed.

Research has shown that the combination of socioeconomic disadvantage and early academic failure contributes to the higher dropout rate among minorities.

According to a Chicago study by Father Charles Kyle, "there is a catastrophically high dropout rate for Hispanics." He cites several studies that put the Hispanic dropout rate in Chicago schools between 71 and 80 percent.

A study by California's Assembly Office of Research found that while the overall dropout rate in that state is about 29 percent,

the rate for blacks and Hispanics is above 40 percent.

The importance of addressing the dropout problem is clearly articulated by U.S. Senator Arlen Specter, "Job prospects for dropouts are worse than bleak. Dropouts who are fortunate find their way into dead-end jobs. The unfortunate ones find their way into prison."

One of the difficulties in dealing with dropout problems is that there is no official definition of what a dropout is, therefore accurate assessment is difficult.

Attrition data provides one of the most common methods of counting dropouts. This data comes from subtracting 12th grade graduation figures from the ninth or tenth grade enrollment count of that same class. That method, however, does not take into account the number of students who may have dropped out prior to the ninth grade.

In spite of the problems in finding hard data on truancy and dropout rates, there is no doubt that school attendance is an important issue. Several indicators point to the seriousness of the problem. For example:

- * For the last five years, school absenteeism (including truancy) has ranked either first or among the top concerns of the National Association of Secondary School Principals as reflected in their annual membership poll.
- * A national survey by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research showed that of the high school seniors surveyed, 13.4 percent said that within a four-week period they were truant from classes for at least one day for reasons other than illness.
- * In a 1985 Gallup Poll, public respondents identified "pupil lack of interest/truancy" as one of the 10 most serious problems facing schools and the community.

Attainment of a basic education is important enough that all 50 states and the District of Columbia have compulsory school attendance/education laws. But it is often difficult to enforce these laws when both school and law enforcement officials find themselves faced with many other high priority problems. However, the importance of dealing effectively with truancy is evident to educational and juvenile justice practitioners who have discussed the apparent links between school truancy and delinquency in the community.

The general observation is when students are truant from school, many become involved in delinquent activities.

Several short-term studies in various communities throughout the nation indicate a link between truancy and daytime delinquency,

particularly residential burglary, and suggest that eliminating truancy may be an answer to decreasing community crime.

Whether the problem is excessive absence or dropping out altogether, non-attendance creates long-range complications for the students, schools and communities.

Compared to the general public, dropouts are more likely to face unemployment, menial jobs and reliance on public assistance. Consider the following:

- * The unemployment rate for dropouts was 23.7 percent compared with 13.8 percent for high school graduates, according to a 1978 report from the U.S. Department of Labor.
- * An American male with less than 12 years of school can expect to earn \$601,000 in a lifetime of steady work. But if that same male graduates from high school, his earnings increase to \$861,000, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

While many of those who drop out end up in similar situations experiencing reduced employment and professional opportunities, the circumstances that lead them there may not all be the same.

A 1982 study for California's State Board of Education by the Open Road/Citizens Policy Center found twice as many boys as girls leave school before graduation and of the girls leaving, two-thirds cite pregnancy as the main reason.

Nationally, 80 percent of pregnant and married female teens drop out, according to the study. Almost a million adolescent girls -- one in ten -- get pregnant every year in this country. Studies show that American teenagers are more likely to get pregnant than teens in most other industrialized nations.

Of the dropouts interviewed, more than half cited school-related reasons while 42 percent said they had family problems. Others said drug or alcohol problems or financial need were the reasons for leaving school.

Student attendance is everyone's responsibility, regardless of whether they have children in school. Now is a good time to increase efforts to address student attendance problems. It would be especially fitting since 1985-86 has been proclaimed as America's Year of School Safety & Student Attendance by the National School Safety Center, as well as by school leaders and governors all over the nation.

There is a definite need for hard data and consistent definitions of truancy and dropouts so the problems can be better assessed. Although some states, such as Illinois and California, have included exact definitions of truancy in their education codes, there is no consistency in defining the problems nationally.

Pending legislation at the federal level calls for establishing a standard definition of a school dropout.

Existing conditions must be defined before effective improvement strategies can be developed.

It is essential that action be taken as soon as potential or actual problems are perceived because the consequences affect the community as well individuals.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE

While there is a tie between truancy and dropout problems, each issue must be addressed differently. Therefore, the strategies for dealing with these are discussed separately.

Truancy Prevention Strategies

The first step toward improving attendance is simply preventing students from staying out of school without a valid reason. Although truants aren't in class, they're often somewhere on or about school grounds causing disruptions. Those who leave campus are most likely loitering somewhere in the community. Efforts to prevent truancy are, therefore, the collaborative responsibility of educators, law enforcers, parents, and community members.

Following is a series of strategies which have worked in schools across the nation.

1. Community Truancy Prevention Committee

The goals and activities of the Committee should be mutually determined by representatives from the school, law enforcement, parents and the community. Prior to the initial meeting, which should occur at the beginning of the school year, a letter should be sent to all parents and residents in the immediate community to explain the following: collaborative nature of the Committee; Committee goals and possible activities; full text of the state's compulsory education law; legal explanation of parental responsibility for a child's school attendance; school policies regarding truant offenses; the connection between truancy, dropouts and crime; the economic consequences of truancy and dropouts; and an invitation to become involved in a collaborative way to help solve the problem.

2. Clear truancy policies

Student codes of conduct should state the legal requirements for school attendance, as well as the school's expectations and clear definitions of what comprises truancy. The policy must also state the school and court consequences of being truant.

3. Parent and community meetings or newsletters

Communication with parents and residents in the immediate

community about truancy is essential. If no Truancy Prevention Committee is present in the community, general meetings should be arranged at the beginning of the school year and quarterly newsletters should be mailed that include updated information about both the continuing problem and improvement. Such communication must include an explanation of the student code of conduct, state compulsory education laws and legal consequences for the truant student, as well as the truancy-dropout connection, and related economic consequences.

4. Law enforcement school visitations

Law enforcers can give guest lectures to classes or plan assemblies to explain the law enforcement and legal response to truancy. If a particular law enforcement program is in effect, the program and its consequences should be carefully explained.

Truancy Intervention Strategies

Identifying the existence of a potential or actual truancy problems requires school intervention. This strategy is especially important as it is designed to diagnose the problem and then find ways to divert the student from serious truant behavior.

1. Teacher involvement and notification of absence

Teachers must be involved in the attendance process through three basic actions: keeping regular and active attendance records; communicating to students the importance of daily class attendance and promptly reporting all absences to the office. Further, if a teacher suspects a student is truant or cutting class, he or she should personally work with the student upon return to class, assign some correctional activity (detention or whatever is used in the school), and communicate with the parents.

2. Immediate follow-up for absence

Phone calls before noon to the homes of all absentees on day of non-attendance brings several positive consequences: a message to the parents and student that the school not only cares, but will not tolerate truancy; a message to other students that if you are truant from school, you will be caught; and sometimes it brings about the immediate return of the truant to school.

3. Parental meetings

When truant behavior is suspected or actually discovered parents should be asked to come to school for a meeting. Parental involvement must be stressed for a collaborative resolution.

4. Academic credits

Many schools face a moral dilemma about whether attendance

should be a factor in granting academic credits. For those schools that deny credit to truants, the reasons and consequences must be made clear to the student and parents after the first offense. Schools that allow credit to be made up must provide formal mechanism for work to be completed immediately after the first truancy to prevent too much make-up work.

5. Public awareness campaign

Schools with a truancy problem should sponsor public awareness campaigns to identify the problem as more than a school concern. By publicizing local daytime juvenile crime rates, (especially residential burglary), loss of school income due to truancy, and other relevant statistics, community members become aware of the problem. Such publicity should be followed by a positive media campaign. Announcements, posters and meetings could emphasize a slogan such as "Love Your Children - Keep Them in School!"

6. School counselor liaisons

When a school begins experiencing truancy problems, it may be time to free counselors from traditional desk-bound assignments for active community liaison functions. Counselors can work within the community to build parent awareness of the problem and to network with law enforcers who often deal with truant students.

7. High risk student counseling or transfer

Students identified as truants or "high risks" for truant behavior (i.e., they demonstrate patterns of excessive tardies or cutting) should be enrolled in career education or guidance courses that may deter them from actual truant behavior. If their classes are not meeting their expectations or if problematic patterns appear, transfer to another class may be necessary. In some cases, transfer to another school within the district may be helpful.

8. Statewide attendance legislation

Statewide laws that require a certain number of days of school attendance and allowing a maximum number of excused and unexcused absences to pass can be an effective truancy intervention strategy. (South Carolina's Education Improvement Act of 1984 requires 170 days of attendance with a maximum of 10 absences; since its passage, many local schools have noticed an increase in student attendance.)

Truancy Response Strategies

Once the truancy problem in a school shifts from a potential or minor problem into an actual or chronic problem, school personnel must be prepared to respond with a variety of options.

1. In-school suspension

Chronic truants may be assigned to isolated classes where the

students are closely supervised rather than sent home. During in-school suspension, students work on classroom assignments, but they may not socialize with other students on campus. All lunch and other breaks are scheduled when other students are in class. These programs report success for several reasons: parents who work are assured suspended students receive appropriate education and supervision; because the student is actually in school, no financial loss is suffered by the school; and students are less likely to fall behind in their studies and can be more easily reintegrated into class.

2. Saturday school program

Saturday school is a structured, supervised, minimum-day program that usually includes tutorial assistance in completing classroom assignments students missed because of excessive trancies, tardies or class cuts. Students are assigned to this program in lieu of suspension. Saturday school infringes on the student's free time and, therefore, usually modifies the behavior that led to the student's being assigned to the program. In addition, the program emphasizes the student's responsibility to arrive on time and to complete classwork.

3. Operation Stay-In School

Operation Stay-in-School, begun in Fresno, California, and now used statewide, is a truancy-reduction program operated under the collaborative sponsorship of a school district and a local law enforcement agency. Its main objective is to enforce compulsory school attendance laws. On stipulated days and hours, law enforcement officers locate unsupervised school-aged students without valid reasons for being out of school during school hours. When truant students are apprehended by law enforcement officers, the student is taken to a reception center. (The California Education Code Section 58625 allows apprehended students to be taken to a reception center operated by the school district.) At the center, personnel contact the school and a parent, who is requested to come to the center and return the student to school. The center provides the opportunity for parents to meet with school personnel to discuss the situation and to talk with their youngsters. In some areas where a reception center is not available, students are returned to their school, and their parents are contacted to set up a conference before the students can be readmitted to the regular school program.

4. Truancy court referral procedures

A collaborative agreement can be arranged between school and court authorities about how to deal with habitual truants and their parents.

5. Student Attendance Review Boards (SARBs)

SARB committees are comprised of school, law enforcement and

county officials who meet to discuss how serious student attendance problems may be resolved. SARBs hold meetings with students and parents, asking for relevant input from school officials. After such meetings, a contract is often signed which indicates exactly what is expected of the student.

6. Juvenile court rulings

In some areas where chronic truancy is a problem, juvenile court judges may exercise their judicial authority to cite parents and their child for contempt of court if the child refuses to attend school. These legal issues are yet to be clearly resolved by the courts.

7. Fines assessment

Districts experiencing heavy financial losses due to chronic truancy can adopt a district policy to levy a series of truancy fines for the offense as well as court costs. Districts interested in such a program should also hire a school/home liaison who can follow each case through the appropriate legal channels and make certain severe cases are actually prosecuted in court.

8. Tighter enforcement of truancy laws

Educators and local law enforcers facing a serious truancy problem can agree to tighten the enforcement of existing truancy laws. Such agreements must be well publicized to the students, parents and community members.

Truancy Reduction Model Programs

The National School Safety Center has identified the following programs to reduce both truant behavior and daytime juvenile crime.

Attendance Awareness Campaign

Pocomoke High School
R.F.D. 2, Box 195
Pocomoke City, MD 21851-9538
301/957-1484

Contact: James H. VanSciver, Principal

The program was developed around staff support, a minimal time commitment, inexpensive tangible rewards and positive, rather than punitive, school action. Since absences increased during the junior and senior years, the program targeted sophomores in an effort to establish positive attendance patterns.

As the fall term began, parents of sophomore students received a letter outlining the program, which was described to the tenth-graders at a school assembly. During the first and second grading periods, a series of positive statements emphasizing the

importance of perfect attendance was read in every sophomore's first period class. A T-shirt was awarded to every student in the tenth grade homeroom with the best attendance record during the project. This encouraged peer pressure promoting good attendance. Students with perfect attendance were recognized in the local media, received certificates and a personal congratulatory letter from the principal. Names of students with perfect monthly attendance were posted on a school bulletin board. The principal also called the home of each tenth grade student who had perfect attendance during the first half of each of the first two grading periods.

Comparisons showed attendance improved over the previous year. In 1983-1984 tenth grade students were absent an average of seven school days during the first two grading periods, but this fell to 3.45 days for the 1984-1985 sophomores. While the sophomore's average daily attendance rate increased over the previous year, it fell for the other three grades.

Rohnert Park Stop and Cite Program

Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety
5200 Country Club Drive
Rohnert Park, California
(707) 585-1122

Contact: Jim Park, Director
Youth Services Bureau

Begun in 1978, the Stop and Cite Program was designed to: reduce truancy and juvenile crime in the community; and to increase average daily attendance funds for the schools. During the program's first year in operation, daylight burglaries in Rohnert Park decreased 48%; during the second year, an additional 16% decrease was noted. Over the same 2-year period, vandalism decreased 35%, thefts decreased 12%, and the savings to the community due to such improvement amounted to \$262,000.

This program stresses "positive" contact between police and students. Patrolmen issue courtesy citations to suspected truants contacted during school hours. Two citations are issued without penalty, and students are returned to school to meet with parent and vice-principal. The third citation results in referral to appropriate support services.

Project HOPE (Helping Others Pursue Education)

Inglewood Unified School District
401 S. Inglewood Avenue
Inglewood, California 90301
(213) 419-2900

Begun during the 1983-84 school year, Project HOPE was designed to be a counseling program to reduce truancy and improve

community climate. After its initial year of operation, school officials reported a general increase in school attendance over the previous year. Additionally, the Inglewood Police Department found that in one month (May 1984), areas served by Project HOPE indicated 40% less incidence of daytime burglaries than in other Inglewood neighborhoods not served by the Project.

Students picked up off the streets, suspended from school, or awaiting expulsion attend the off-campus counseling and instruction center. A credentialed coordinator, counselor, teacher, teacher aide and a district security guard closely supervise the students.

Students with chronic discipline problems other than truancy are referred to law enforcement agencies where appropriate. Students remaining at Project HOPE are counseled on an individual or group basis. The Center offers basic skill instruction and expects suspended students to complete homework.

School-Based Delinquency Prevention-Diversion Program

Peer Group Counseling
Berrien County Juvenile Court
Division of Court Services
County Courthouse
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085

The program, which involved local school personnel, a citizen advisory council and the local Youth Services Bureau, established a delinquency prevention and treatment program for area high school and junior high school students. Results from the program, which was held from October 1977 through September 30, 1977, indicated a 31.7% reduction in truancy and a 64.5% reduction in community delinquency.

The Peer Counseling Program involved groups of 12 to 15 students who met to openly communicate and create a positive atmosphere for attitude change. During the 1976-77 school year, 236 students were involved in 14 full-time groups; another 300 participated on part-time basis. Teachers, school administrators, group leaders or students identified those in need of the program. Group facilitators included school and juvenile court personnel.

Dropout Prevention Strategies

Because the dropout problem affects home and community life, resolution necessarily involves parents, community members, law enforcers, juvenile justice personnel and youth-serving professionals.

These groups, along with educators, need to form a support network to prevent students from dropping out of school.

Since attendance behavior is learned, early efforts should be used to deter the development of student absentee patterns. Initial efforts should be directed at students, parents and school staff. The following strategies are recommended:

1. Clear attendance policies

State regulations and district attendance policy and procedures must be clearly explained and widely disseminated to students, parents and staff. A clear description of the truancy policy should be included in the student conduct code to be distributed to students and parents.

2. School staff training

School personnel, especially classroom teachers, need training which explains the importance and legal ramifications of enforcing attendance policy and procedures. Training may include methods for identifying and assisting high-risk students, techniques for efficient record-keeping, and facts about the financial impact on the school of non-attendance, and daytime juvenile crime, especially residential burglary.

3. Parent support

Parent support is essential, and meetings, bulletins and other communications with parents should communicate clearly the importance of regular attendance. Parents must be notified and their aid requested when absentee patterns begin.

4. Academic aid

Students whose classwork has suffered because of attendance problems may need opportunities for independent study or tutorial instruction.

5. Attendance record reviews

An annual attendance record review helps schools identify students with poor attendance patterns in previous years. Reviews made before school opens allow staff to schedule interviews with these students at the beginning of the academic year. Interviewers can discuss reasons for absences, apprehensions about school, the relationship between attendance and academic success, consequences of not graduating and ways to improve attendance. Weekly or monthly reviews of students with attendance problems indicate if additional intervention is needed.

6. Build self-esteem

Dropout prevention programs must address the special needs of students most likely to leave school before graduation. In primary grades the goal is a safe, no-risk classroom environment. Curriculum includes activities which build self-esteem, develop problem-solving skills and encourage regular attendance. Secondary school programs should reinforce and extend these primary school efforts. Junior and senior high counselors must help instructors identify and

monitor potential dropouts and enlist the support and involvement of their parents.

Dropout Intervention Strategies

When attendance, truancy or dropout problems appear, schools must initiate efforts to interrupt and change unacceptable patterns.

1. Counseling

Individual or group counseling is needed for students with erratic attendance. Parents should be notified and offered support as well. Students and parents must be informed of laws mandating attendance.

2. Adopt-A-Student

Adopt-A-Student or peer programs may encourage better attendance. Teachers, student or community volunteers work with individual students to develop and promote attendance goals.

3. Alternative classes

A special curriculum or program changes may be needed to improve attendance. Independent study, tutorial, half-day, homebound or self-contained classes are options. In an extreme situation transfer to another school setting may be necessary to remove a student from peer situations contributing to absenteeism. Pregnant students often require alternative education programs which include secondary education instruction, job training and support services, such as counseling, child care, health services and G.E.D. preparation.

4. Public programs

Public awareness campaigns can help reduce truancy and dropout rates. New instruction units can involve students in developing and enforcing attendance rules. A speakers' panel, composed of successful or well-known adults who themselves overcame attendance or dropout problems, can be formed to address student and community audiences on the social and economic consequences of such behavior.

5. Special Interagency Teams

Students with high potential for dropping out can be referred to an interagency team (or I-Team), which includes school, law enforcement and community members. The team develops programs for individual students, encourages parent involvement, identifies any medical problems and refers students to appropriate school and community agencies. When possible, the team also works to improve the student's home environment.

Dropout Response Strategies

When attendance becomes a chronic problem or students drop out,

school personnel need to respond quickly and differently.

1. Student interviews

Interviews by a counselor can determine if excessive absences are related to psychological disorders, learning disabilities or family problems. These discussions can encourage school attendance and establish a plan for the absentee, truant or dropout to return to the academic environment. A buddy system, pairing the returnee with a student who successfully reentered, is an effective policy. Counselor monitored programs offering rewards or attendance contracts promote attendance.

2. Workshops for Students

Responding to the needs of students who have legally quit school, educators can sponsor return-to-school workshops. Invited school dropouts learn about increased employment and other benefits for graduates. Counselors describe ways the school will assist in the return to school.

3. Workshops For Parents

Workshops for parents of dropouts provide positive reinforcement to those supporting readmission. Parents learn about the adjustments students face when returning. Parents and reenrolling students should be personally recruited and, when possible, transported to the workshop by a school employee.

4. Alternative Schools

Alternative education opportunities should be provided for students who are unwilling or unable to resume a traditional academic program. Vocational or skill centers, sometimes known as "second chance" schools, teach returning students a trade as well as basic educational skills. Students graduating from centers must demonstrate minimum academic skills.

5. Continuation Schools

Continuation schools offer another alternative educational environment for high school dropouts. Students usually have individualized instruction and learn at their own pace. While the learning environment is different than the traditional school, students study the same basic courses, receive the same credits and must pass identical minimum academic skill tests to graduate.

6. Teen Mother Programs

If they didn't drop out during their pregnancy, teen mothers are likely to drop out after the baby is born because of child care problems, exhaustion, lack of support and financial need. Education is essential for teenage mothers who now also are responsible for the future and well-being of a baby as well as themselves. One approach to keep young mothers in school and help them as much as possible is a

comprehensive program that offers child care, parenting skills, job training and varied opportunities for the mother to complete her education. Child care facilities on or near the high school campus provide the student parents an opportunity to spend time with their children during the school day. The child care component of the program also provides an opportunity for community members to get involved and help in the efforts to prevent dropouts.

Dropout Prevention Model Programs

Educators throughout the nation have developed many successful school programs. Usually what works at one school can be adapted to meet similar problems at another campus. Brief descriptions of the programs follow:

New Futures School

2120 Louisiana Boulevard, NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110
505/883-5680

Contact: Caroline Gaston, Director

Since 1970 New Futures School, an alternative school of the Albuquerque Public School System, has offered programs to help keep pregnant and parenting teens in school. Employment training, counseling, child care and health services, secondary education and GED preparation have been offered. Support has come from the public school district, a Community Development Block Grant, the Jobs Training Partnership Act, a Social Services Block Grant and private foundations. During the 1984-85 school year, of the 450 youths served, approximately 50 teen parents had subsidized employment. The employment training component was not funded for 1985-86, but New Futures is seeking support to reinstate this component in 1986-87.

Satisfactory school progress and daily participation in job training class has been required for participation in the student employment program, which awarded school credit for work experience. The center recruited community employers and offered vocational awareness programs, funded by a grant from the Levi Strauss Foundation.

Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Program

Richmond Public Schools
301 North Ninth Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804/780-5459

Contact: Ralph Dickens, Project Administrator

Richmond Public Schools recognized the high correlation between students who are habitually truant and who drop out of school. It was also concerned with the lowered academic performance and increased daytime criminal involvement of truant youths. The Richmond Dropout Prevention Program was established to return out-of-school youth to school, to enforce the compulsory school attendance law, and to reduce the dropout rate significantly.

Three "T" (truancy) centers are maintained in the city's main geographic regions. Truants or suspected truants are taken to the nearest "T" center, usually by city police officers. Parents are notified, a warning is issued and the student is returned to school. "T" center staff monitor the student's attendance following the first offense, and if the problem persists, the student is referred to the court.

Alternative and Continuing Education

Fullerton Union High School District
780 Beechwood Avenue
Fullerton, California 92635
714/879-5930

Contact: Jean Klinghoffer, Coordinator

The program also helps potential dropouts who have a need to learn English and/or improve basic literacy skills.

Students in grades 9 through 12 are served by a variety of programs that retain potential dropouts and help other students who would otherwise have problems graduating from high school.

Students who are employed can complete their high school diploma through independent study contracts. Students who are 16-18 years old who are unable to adjust to the comprehensive high school setting may enroll in the Continuation High School. For 14-16 year-old youths, opportunity classes are available to prevent high risk youth from dropping out of school. These classes are usually small to provide a lot of individualized attention and guidance.

Classes are strategically located throughout the communities served by the district, and class schedules run from early morning to late evening to accommodate special needs such as those of employed students, pregnant minors, and teenage mothers.

Close cooperation with ROP and JTPA strengthens program offerings and student opportunities to combine classroom work with valuable vocational training.

Cities In Schools, Inc.

1110 Vermont Avenue N.W. Suite 1120
Washington, D.C. 20005
202/861-0230

Contact: Andrea McAleenan

During the 1960's and early 1970's, staff who would later form Cities In Schools, Inc. (CIS), were working inner-city areas to develop what were called "Street Academies" for high school dropouts. The purpose of the street academy program was to offer an alternative to those young people, drawn especially from the poor and disadvantaged, who had dropped out of school before graduation, and appeared caught in the dead-end unemployment/crime/welfare cycle.

Although the street academies were initially funded almost exclusively from private sources (primarily large corporations), the program now receives support from public sources.

The various CIS model programs throughout the country coordinate both educational and social services to youth through working partnerships between public and private sector leadership.

Since its inception, the CIS program has consistently demonstrated its ability to keep potential dropouts in school, bring current dropouts back to school, improve attendance and increase academic achievement.

For example, during the 1982-1983 school year:

- * In Houston, students referred to CIS as juvenile offender or truancy cases improved their attendance from a pre-CIS rate of 57 percent up to 88 percent.
- * In Atlanta, where more than half the CIS students had been dropouts prior to enrolling in CIS, students attendance rate went up to 82 percent.
- * In New York, CIS students gained an average of 1.3 years in reading achievement. This more than doubled their previous gains in reading in the year prior to CIS.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE INFORMATION

Educators, community members, parents and law enforcers have many available resources from which to choose when tackling an attendance problem. The following examples, while not comprehensive, provide a representative sampling of school attendance resources which may be helpful.

Children Out of School in America. Children's Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project, Inc., October 1974.

Coleman, James S.; Hoffer, Thomas; and Kilgore, Sally. High School Achievement. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

Community/School Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Program. Richmond, Virginia: Richmond Public Schools (printed 1980-81, revised 1983-84).

Dropping Out, Losing Out: The High Cost for California; A report prepared by the California Assembly Office of Research, Sept. 1985.

Fresno Interagency Task Force. Report of the Fresno Interagency Task Force on School Dropouts. Fresno, California: Fresno Interagency Committee, March 1984.

Levin, Henry M., The Effects of Dropping Out, A report to the Select Committee on Educational Opportunity of the U.S. Senate, Washington D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office. August 1972.

Nyangoni, Betty W., "Truancy and the Absent-Minded Student," School Safety, NSSC Newsjournal, Spring 1985.

Open Road Issues Research Project Citizens Policy Center; Push Out, Step Out - A Report on California's Public School Drop-Outs, 1982.

Plisko, Valena White, The Condition of Education. National Center for Education Statistics, 1984 edition.

Rumberger, Russell W., Dropping Out of High School: The Influence of Race, Sex and Family Background; American Educational Research Journal, Summer 1983 Vol. 20, No. 2.

Thornton, William E. Jr.; James, Jennifer; and Doerner, William G. Delinquency and Justice, Random House, New York 1984.

Organizations and Contacts

International Association of Pupil Personnel Workers
c/o William Meyer
Mt. View, Post Office Box 36
Barnesville, Maryland 20838

National Diffusion Network
Resource Development and Dissemination
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue S.W. Brown Building 1604-30
Washington D.C. 20202

National Diffusion Network
California Facilitator Center
1575 Old Bayshore Highway
Burlingame, California 94010

John Burton, Consultant
Administrative Services, Attendance and Welfare
Office of the Los Angeles County Supt. of Schools
Los Angeles County Education Center
9300 East Imperial Highway
Downey, California 90242

Bleak dropout stats are raising concern



While rarely discussed in commission reports and studies, the nation's school dropout rate has reached crisis proportions. Nationally, about 25 percent or about one million students drop out every year.

Some states have dropout rates which are much worse than the national norm. One of those, California, has a dropout rate in excess of 30 percent. A decade ago the nation's most populous state had a rate of less than half that - 14 percent. But even that is not the worst of it. The District of Columbia and Louisiana have dropout rates beyond 40 percent.

Last October, at the direction of legislators Gloria Molina (D-Los Angeles) and Bill Leonard (R-Redlands), the California Assembly Office of Research published a study, titled, "Dropping Out, Losing Out: The High Cost for California." It was based on a study tracking 335,000 students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 1979. Four years later only 236,900 of those students graduated from high school. Almost 100,000 never made it.

Cathy Minicucci, chief consultant for the Office of Research, says students leave school because they are failing classes, they want to work or they become pregnant.

"Dropouts tend to be over-age for their grade and sometimes just run out of time to pass required courses," she added. "Some dropouts fail district proficiency tests or courses required to graduate," she concluded.

A startling observation ends the 100-page report: "If left unchecked, the large numbers of high school dropouts entering adult life with poor academic skills will undermine the economic growth of California." The same read-

ily can be said for the nation as a whole. (To obtain a copy of this important and informative report, contact: Assembly Office of Research, State of California, 1100 - J Street, Room 535, Sacramento, California 95814, 916/445-1638.)

Later the same month, Governor George Deukmejian signed Senate Bill 65, authored by Senator Art Torres (D-South Pasadena), which provides \$3.1 million to fund programs aimed at stemming the dropout hemorrhage. When the bill was signed, Senator Torres described the dropout rate as "staggering" and as "escalating at an alarming rate." He said his bill provides money for school districts to set up "early identification" programs in an effort to find "high risk youth" who are likely to become dropouts.

There also will be money for school districts to sign contracts with independent clinics which will try to get young people to return to school or pass a high school equivalency examination. (To obtain a copy of Senate Bill 65, contact: Senator Art Torres, State Capitol, Sacramento, California 95814, 916/445-3456.)

Illinois is also taking steps to deal with dropouts. In September Governor James R. Thompson signed several bills in a bipartisan legislative package proposed by the Hispanic Dropout Task Force. As he signed those bills, Governor Thompson said they were adopted to "encourage attendance in our public schools and lessen the dropout rate among public school students." (To obtain copies of these various bills, contact: Governor James R. Thompson, State of Illinois, 207 State House, Springfield, Illinois 62706, 217/782-7355.)

This important package of dropout bills was a team effort. However, the two key figures in this effort were Father Charles Kyle and Director Roberto Rivera of Mayor Howard Washington's Chicago Intervention Network, who are helping to make important progress which will ultimately help all our nation's schools.

The federal government is now getting into the act as well. A bipartisan coalition of Northeastern senators introduced a \$50 million proposal, S. 1771, to prevent students from dropping out of high school. While some hearings have been held, the bill is still pending. (Also see H.R. 3042.)

"By allowing so many youngsters to leave school early," says Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut), one of the bill's sponsors, "we are creating a deep division between those who have the necessary educational tools to contribute to society and those who don't. This bill provides the means to prevent that division from becoming a permanent fixture on the American scene."

S. 1771, The Dropout Prevention and Reentry Act, would provide \$500,000 in the first year for a comprehensive study of dropouts. The remainder of the money would be allocated to school districts according to their size and the severity of their dropout problem.

"What we fail to invest in dropout prevention, we will eventually be forced to pay many times over in social costs," declares Senator Claiborne Pell (D-Rhode Island).

"Job prospects for dropouts," according to Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania), "are worse than bleak. Dropouts who are fortunate find their way into dead-end jobs. The unfortunate ones find their way into prison." (To obtain a copy of S. 1771, contact: Senator Edward M. Kennedy, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510, 202/224-4543.)

While the tone of all this is negative, it doesn't have to be. There are numerous innovative approaches available to alleviate the dropout problem in America. Those mentioned here are only a few of them. □

Prepared by George Nicholson, director and chief counsel for NSSC.

Principals: Schools are better now

By Andy Kanengiser
USA TODAY

Education quality is improving, high school principals say, and the school reform movement is a major reason.

But a shortage of money remains a stumbling block, says a survey out today of 234 high school principals conducted by the 35,000-member National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Among principals:

■ 83 percent say education quality in their schools has improved in the past five years.

■ 67 percent say national attention on education, stemming from recent reports urging reform, has helped improve student learning.

■ 53 percent say the lack of money is their biggest problem and has "hampered the reform movement," says James Keefe of the association.

■ Only 36 percent say teacher shortages are worse in their schools than they were five years ago, despite media reports of such a shortage.

■ 22 percent of those citing a lack of teachers need math instructors, 13 percent need science instructors.

■ 90 percent say teachers in their schools are "high quality." And 66 percent say teachers work harder now than teachers did five years ago.

■ 19 percent rate attendance as the No. 1 problem; 16 percent say it is discipline.

■ 83 percent say they are glad they chose education as their profession.

■ 70 percent say news media treat their schools fairly.

THE 17TH ANNUAL GALLUP POLL

of the public's attitudes toward the public schools

PHI DELTA KAPPA

SEPTEMBER 1985

by Alec M. Gallup

The annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, now financed by Phi Delta Kappa, is intended to be a continuing source of reliable information concerning trends in opinion about significant school questions. For school officials, the poll is valuable in at least two ways: It alerts decision makers to overall public reaction to a variety of school programs and policies, and it serves as a national benchmark against which local attitudes can be measured.

Local officials are welcome to use questions asked in the Gallup education surveys. The questions are not copyrighted. Moreover, no limits are placed on the use of information contained in these reports, beyond customary credit

to the source and observance of the canons of accuracy and completeness of quotation.

Phi Delta Kappa's Dissemination Division, assisted by the Gallup Organization, is prepared to help school districts and other agencies survey local populations on education questions. For details of this service, called PACE (Polling Attitudes of the Community on Education), write or telephone Wilmer Bugher, associate executive secretary for administration, Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. The phone number is 812/339-1158.

1985 Rating of the Public Schools

The public rates the public schools as favorably in 1985 as it rated them in 1984, when the schools achieved the highest grades for performance in a decade.

This year, 43% of those interviewed gave the public schools in their communities a grade of A or B — a figure statistically equal to the 42% who gave their local public schools a grade of A or B last year. The 1984 ratings were up sharply over 1983, when only 31% of respondents gave their local public schools a grade of A or B.

Three respondents in 10 this year said that their local schools deserve a grade of C. Only 14% said that the public schools in their communities deserve a grade of D or FAIL.

As has always been the case, those individuals most closely in touch with the public schools tended again in 1985 to perceive the local public schools more favorably. Among respondents with children attending public schools, 52% gave the public schools in their communities a grade of A or B. Among respondents with no children in school, only 39% gave the local public schools a grade of A or B.

Biggest Problems Facing the Public Schools in 1985

The U.S. public continues to regard discipline as the most important problem facing the public schools. This has been true in every poll but one since this series began in 1969.

One-quarter of all citizens polled named "discipline" the biggest problem facing the public schools, roughly the same percentage as in previous polls. The next most frequently mentioned problem was "use of drugs," a discipline-related area mentioned by 18% of the public in this year's poll. The most frequently cited problem that pertains to the quality of schooling is "poor curriculum/poor standards," mentioned by 11% of the public. The only other responses mentioned by more than 5% of the public are "difficulty in getting good teachers" and "lack of proper financial support," mentioned by 10% and 9% of the public respectively.

The question:

What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Lack of discipline	25	23	25	43
Use of drugs	18	18	20	11
Poor curriculum/poor standards	11	11	11	10
Difficulty in getting good teachers	10	10	12	12
Lack of proper financial support	9	9	9	8
Pupils' lack of in- terest/truancy	5	6	4	3
Large schools/over- crowding	5	4	7	7

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Integration/busing	4	5	2	*
Teachers' lack of interest	4	3	6	8
Drinking/alcoholism	3	3	2	5
Parents' lack of interest	3	3	3	6
Lack of respect for teachers/other students	3	3	2	1
Mismanagement of funds/programs	2	2	4	5
Low teacher pay	2	1	2	4
Moral standards	2	2	1	2
Lack of needed teachers	2	1	3	1
Communication problems	2	1	3	1
Crime/vandalism	2	1	2	*
Lack of proper facilities	1	1	1	1
Problems with administration	1	*	1	1
School board policies	1	1	1	*
Government interference	1	1	*	1
Teacher strikes	1	1	*	1
Parental involvement in school activities	1	1	1	1
Too many schools/declining enrollment	1	1	1	1
Transportation	1	1	1	*
Non-English-speaking students	1	1	1	1
Fighting	1	1	2	*
There are no problems	2	1	4	*
Miscellaneous	4	3	5	10
Don't know	14	19	4	4

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Rights and Privileges of Public School Students

By a margin of more than 3-1 (40% to 12%), the U.S. public feels that local public school students have too many rights and privileges rather than not enough. One-fourth of the public feels that students have about the right amount of privileges.

This relationship has remained fairly stable since 1975, when the question was last asked. However, the 1985 findings differ substantially from those of the 1972 survey. At that time, almost as large a percentage of the public felt that students did not have enough rights as felt that they had too many.

The question:

Generally speaking, do the local public school students in this community have too many rights and privileges, or not enough?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Too many	40	38	42	55
Not enough	12	12	13	5
Just about right	25	23	35	22
No opinion	23	27	10	18
NATIONAL TOTALS	1985 %	1975 %	1972 %	
Too many	40	45	41	
Not enough	12	10	11	
Just about right	25	27	33	
No opinion	23	18	15	

Rights of Public School Authorities To Examine Student Property

By a 4-1 margin (78% to 18%), the public supports the right of school authorities to open students' lockers or to examine their personal property for contraband — drugs, liquor, or stolen property. Recently, this controversy has arisen in a number of communities. Parents are even more in favor of granting this authority to the schools than are nonparents.

The question:

Do you feel that teachers or school authorities should or should not be allowed to open students' lockers or examine personal property if they suspect drugs, liquor, or stolen goods are hidden there?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	78	75	84	88
Should not	18	19	15	10
Don't know	4	5	1	1

Preferred Solutions To Discipline Problems

When Americans are asked to choose the solutions they prefer from a list of suggested ways to solve discipline problems, they tend to choose the least harsh measures.

The public responds most favorably to those solutions that involve discussion and instruction, for both teachers and parents. The most frequently chosen solutions were "classes for teachers on how to deal with problem children," chosen by 84% of the public; "discussion groups with parents of problem children," chosen by 82% of the public; and "required classes for parents of problem children," chosen by 50% of the public.

The next most popular solutions would deal with problem students within the school system, by suspending students who exhibit extreme behavior problems (46%), by forming special classes (45%), or by creating work-study programs in which students attend school half-time and work half-time (44%).

Forty-two percent of the public would favor beefing up the court system, the probation system, and work programs for delinquent youths. Only 21% of the public would favor establishing alternative schools for students with discipline problems.

The question:

Lack of discipline is often cited as a problem confronting the public schools. Please look over this list and tell me which of these possible solutions you think would be most helpful in improving school discipline.

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Classes for teachers on how to deal with problem children	84	82	87	73

Law locks truants out of court

Justice system powerless to force attendance

CHICAGO, ILL.

TRIBUNE

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OCT 29 1968

By Anne Keegan

On any given day in Chicago, from the time the morning tardy bell rings until the last busser goes off in the afternoon, there are an estimated 15,000 children missing from their seats in public school classrooms.

At least one-third of them are truant. Chronically truant. They are children under 16 who aren't just skipping a day of school here and there. They are children who simply don't go.

Some of them are truant because their parents don't care. Their mothers never bothered to wake them up in time for school, or prepare clean clothes to wear, or help them with homework. So the kids spend their days loitering about the house, watching game shows and soap operas.

Some are kept home to babysit for their younger brothers and sisters while the mother goes on her way. Some have medical problems, such as needing eyeglasses or hearing aids, that the family never attended to. Or some got beaten up or were sexually abused by the man of the house, whom he showed up drunk the night before.

Other children are truant because they no longer care. They'd rather do something that's easy and more fun than school, like hang out on street corners with the big guys and drink beer out of a paper sack. Get stoned. Room all day. Jump turnstiles at "L" stations. Mix with neighborhood gang members who skip school, too. Steal hubcaps. Lift a few items from a store. Have sex. Hustle on the street. Anything to break the boredom and find action.

Experts in and out of the education field say that the fight against such absences was weakened two years ago by a new state law that removed the authority of judges to act in cases of chronic truancy.

"In essence, that bill abolished compulsory education in Illinois," says Circuit Judge John Steigmann of Champaign County, who was an ardent opponent of the change in the law that removed truants from court.

There are at least 10,000 chronic truants in Chicago. But that figure from the Board of Education is considered conservative by many experts, who believe the figure is closer to 15,000.

Day after day, these children learn nothing. For each day they miss class, they fall behind in terms of education, discipline, socialization and self-esteem. For each day they are truant, they have a harder time sitting in when

they come back, which feeds their truancy again.

In an era when new attention is being directed to the problem of high school dropouts, considerably less is being aimed at what breeds it: truancy.

"Kids don't just drop out of school when they hit 16 because they have a job," says one Chicago truant officer. "They drop out because they have nothing going for them. There is no such thing as a dropout. That's the wrong word. They are indents."

"By the time they are 16, they've been fading out of the system for years. Dropping out is only the end result of fading out and it begins with truancy in 1st and 2nd grade."

On Jan. 1, 1963, Senate Bill 641 changed Illinois law so that Juvenile Courts no longer had the authority to deal with habitual truants.

Previously, a judge could place truants under supervision with a provision that they must go to school every day. But the change in the law turned the responsibility of truants away from the courts and over to local social agencies.

The agencies have jurisdiction to intervene in the truant's case, but have no authority to enforce cooperation from the truant or his family.

"There is still a compulsory education law in Illinois but the law that allowed the Juvenile Courts to enforce it was wiped off the statute," Judge Steigmann said.

"There is no way to enforce the law requiring Illinois children to go to school and the kids know it."

"You ask any adult in the State of Illinois if they know they can't make their kids go to school anymore and they wouldn't believe you, but it is true," says Kathy Ryan, former supervising state's attorney for Cook County in Juvenile Court.

"The change in the law took away the bottom line," says Jan Chmela, who works for the Chicago Board of Education's truancy alternative program and has been a teacher and a truant officer.

"Nobody is advocating locking up children who are truants," she says. "There are all sorts of social agencies which can intervene and help. . . . But if there is a law that says children must go to school up until 16, there has to be a bottom line you use after every other effort has failed."

State Sen. Aldo De Angelis (R, Olympia Fields) sponsored the bill that changed the law. Although he admits he often is "battered" for it, he defends it.

"The court has never been a

remedy for truancy. With truants, you are not dealing with delinquents who've committed a crime, you are dealing with kids who haven't gone to school. You are dealing with a troubled adolescent," De Angelis says.

Although De Angelis said statewide truancy rates have dropped since the law changed, Illinois State Board of Education figures show an increase.

Chronic truancy during the 1962-1963 school year, when the law changed, was reported at 18,206 throughout Illinois. The following school year, 1963-1964, it rose to 21,263.

Tom Greyson, of the state school board truancy program, concedes:

"It is no longer a law in Illinois to make kids go to school, to use the courts as a threat to go to school. Just forcing them there doesn't mean they are going to learn."

"There are compulsory education laws that have been there for 100 years. If the law is there, we need an enforcement mechanism. But the courts should be the very last resort."

In Chicago, which suffers the bulk of the state's dropout problem as well as chronic truancy, dropout rates in Chicago are more than twice what they are Downstate. A shortage of truancy personnel often cripples attempts to track down the kids who are missing from school.

There are 174 truant officers serving 695 elementary schools and 44 high schools. All truant officers handling high schools in Chicago are assigned to two. Many officers for elementary schools are assigned to three.

"We desperately need more truant officers just to find these kids," says truant officer Rubin Torres, who is assigned to Austin and Clemente High Schools, the latter having one of the city's highest dropout rates. "Because if we don't find them, nobody else will."

The authority for dealing with the truancy problem has been placed into a network of social agencies, police youth divisions, school psychiatric programs and statewide agencies such as the Department of Children and Family Services.

"Being truant may not be committing a crime or hurting another person," says one Chicago truant officer. "It's worse. These kids are hurting themselves. They are cutting off any future they could ever have, any escape from poverty they might have gotten through an education."

"But, I ask you, what do we do with them when they are grown?"

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3 Rs are relax, run, roam for 13,000 kids each day

By MEG KISSINGER
of The Journal staff

Each school day, while most Wisconsin children are learning to read and write and count, more than 13,000 of their classmates are skipping school.

And the law does nothing to stop them.

Instead of studying, hundreds of Wisconsin children lie in bed all day, watching cartoons and soap operas. Or they hang out on street corners. Some go to shopping malls, movie theaters, video arcades. Others sell drugs, have sex, shoplift, steal cars, drink wine, smoke dope.

As each day passes, the chances that these children will return to school grow dimmer.

The law does not punish children who skip school.

"It's a toothless tiger," said Don Jackson, an assistant district attorney in Milwaukee County who deals with repeat violent juvenile offenders. "It's got no punch."

Wisconsin does not have truant officers. Police who see children on the streets during school hours have no authority to detain them or take them back to school, a situation that officers find frustrating.

"I see a kid that I know should be in school and I can't even ask him why he isn't there," said George Sanquist, a Milwaukee police Gang Squad officer. "I'm not saying that being able to give these kids tickets for truancy would solve all of our problems, but it sure would cut down on crime."

It's not long before children hanging out on the streets get involved in gangs, Sanquist said.

"They don't have much to do out there but learn how to steal," he said. "Where there are kids hanging out, there usually is trouble."